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ABSTRACT

During the past several decades, educators have been experimenting with a variety of humanistic innovations to enrich students' academic, social, and emotional growth. These innovations include mainstreaming, inclusion, and detracking, and their intent is to reach out to all students, especially at-risk learners. To reach out, however, requires substantial support. Support is vitally important because students' "at-riskness" will not disappear and because the United States government and educational community continue to believe in the efficacy of raising academic standards. The following sources of support are therefore intended as a complement to and a scaffold for teachers and administrators who experiment with different ways of meeting a diversity of learning needs. At-risk learners benefit from instructional activities that are carefully planned and supported by classroom teachers and learning center staff. Unfortunately, in many schools, disabled students get a de-gutted, fragmented version of the mainstream lesson with no clear connections to it; instead of discussing a book and writing about it, they may do some workbook exercises. One model for integrating disabled and nondisabled learners schedules language arts for 7 periods a week; the 2 extra periods are devoted to group and individual work addressing the specific skill level of the students. Other helpful approaches include teamwork between the special education teacher and the classroom teacher; the use of volunteers and paraprofessionals; the use of wide-ranging and important resource materials; and the reduction of class sizes. (A sample teaching schedule is attached.) (TB)

Reaching Out to a Diversity of Learners: Innovative Educators Need Substantial Support

Joseph Sanacore

During the past several decades, educators have been experimenting with a variety of humanistic innovations to enrich students' academic, social, and emotional growth. These innovations include mainstreaming, inclusion, and detracking, and their intent is to reach out to all students, especially at-risk learners. While responding to a diversity of learning needs, educators are simultaneously being asked to raise standards for their students. For example, in New York State, high school students are now required to complete several Regents courses. During the next several years, more Regents courses across the curriculum will be required. The goal of the New York State Education Department is to phase in the all-Regents curriculum so that students are exposed to more challenging standards and therefore are better prepared to enter college or the workplace. This direction concerning innovative efforts and higher standards is taking place throughout the United States.

Since teachers and administrators believe in the value of this direction, they undoubtedly will do their best to accommodate the needs of all students, including those at risk of failing. To successfully reach out to a diversity of learners, however, requires substantial support. Although budget-minded critics will argue that such support is costly, they need to be reminded that an investment in prevention today will eliminate or lessen the expense of remediation tomorrow. Preventive efforts are also sensitive to the emotional frustrations and self-esteem problems associated with remedial instruction. Furthermore,

support that is aimed at prevention is well-matched with society's thrust to erase illiteracy and aliteracy.

Not surprisingly, educators who receive substantial help are more effective when carrying out worthwhile innovations that increase all students' potential for success. This notion of support is vitally important because students' "at-riskness" will not disappear and because the United States government and educational community continue to believe in the efficacy of raising academic standards. The following sources of support are therefore intended as a complement to and a scaffold for teachers and administrators who experiment with different ways of meeting a diversity of learning needs.

Curricular congruence

At-risk learners benefit from instructional activities that are carefully planned and mutually supported by classroom teachers and learning center staff. Unfortunately, many schools provide separate instruction in both settings. For example, in the English classroom, students may explore the theme of good and evil by reading and discussing William Golding's **Lord of the Flies,** whereas in the learning center, at-risk students may complete workbook exercises and other fragmented activities that are unrelated to the instructional theme. Clearly, at-risk learners are more likely to be successful when classroom and learning center teachers provide them with congruent goals,

resources, strategies, and skills.

In the October 1988 issue of **The Clearing House**, I discuss the importance of connecting the classroom and the learning center, and I suggest a model that can be adapted to both push-in and pull-out efforts. This model represents an ambitious approach, and it can be a major source of support for at-risk learners. Specifically, these learners receive language arts instruction seven periods a week. Twice a week, the majority of students experience a double period of instruction, while the at-risk learners are enriched with activities that support the language arts program. For example, if **Lord of the Flies** is being highlighted, the classroom teacher might immerse students in interactive activities concerning important themes, concepts, and vocabulary of the novel. Meanwhile, the learning center teacher might engage individuals in a similar instructional focus, while providing support through a prereading plan, structured overview, semantic mapping, or semantic feature analysis.

An important part of this classroom/learning center connection is cooperative planning time that is built into the teaching assignments of the English staff. These professionals are scheduled weekly for twenty-four periods of teaching and for one period of mutual planning with the learning center staff (see Figure). During the planning session, the key players discuss their community of learners and organize congruent activities that support effective learning.

Creating a closer link between the classroom and the

learning center makes sense. This approach increases transfer of learning and simultaneously lessens the incidence of fragmented, reductionistic teaching. Thus, at-risk learners have more opportunities to engage in cohesive instruction directly related to their learning strengths and needs. Although curricular congruence is not a cure-all, it is a serious source of support for helping at-risk learners to be successful and independent.

Special education teacher as team teacher

Similar to the intent of curricular congruence is the changing role of the special education teacher serving as a team teacher. This inclusionary perspective helps learners with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities to be successful in the heterogeneous classroom and, thus, to be genuine members of the learning community. In a chapter of Richard Villa and Jacqueline Thousand's **Creating an Inclusive School** (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1995), middle grades science teacher Nancy Keller and special educator Lia Cravedi-Cheng describe their bonding as team teachers, which led to the social and academic growth of both themselves and their students. Initially, the key players decided to meet at least one period each week for mutual planning. During this time, they focused on building a trusting relationship as they defined and redefined professional roles, discussed content to be covered, planned related instructional activities, and assessed student outcomes. These and other planning agendas set the stage

for continued growth with a variety of joint responsibilities, such as having conferences with parents, managing student behavior, and covering the logistics (e.g., setting up labs). While reflecting on their professional growth, Keller and Cravedi-Cheng realized that successful inclusion occurs when both teachers and students receive support. Especially important for the team teachers were continuous opportunities to plan cooperatively, develop goals, consider flexible roles, maintain personal accountability, and engage in reflection. These experiences helped the teachers to merge their talents, to reaffirm their commitment to all students, and to reach their audience academically and socially. As was expected, both special needs students and their nondisabled peers became contributing members of the learning community.

Similar sources of support are presented in the December 1994/January 1995 issue of **Educational Leadership**, which focuses on the theme of the inclusive school. In her article "Essential Questions--Inclusive Answers," Cheryl Jorgensen describes an interdisciplinary program at Souhegan High School (Amherst, New Hampshire). The learning environment for grades nine and ten involves two teams for each grade level, with approximately eighty-five students in each team. Social studies, science, English, and special education teachers share daily blocks of time--2 1/2 hours in the morning and one hour in the afternoon--and these professionals may organize instruction in a variety of ways to accommodate students' learning needs. An important part of these efforts is collaborative planning time for content area

teachers and special educators.

Interestingly, special needs students at Souhegan High do not usually require instructional modifications in their heterogeneously grouped classes; however, when support is needed for nurturing full participation, it may be provided by peers, adults, adapted resources, or assistive technology. Individuals also benefit from modified expectations; for example, a physically disabled learner may have his or her lines in a theatrical performance tape-recorded by a classmate. When the lines are to be read aloud, the disabled learner leans on a pressure switch, which then activates the lines.

These kinds of positive experiences benefit the entire learning community. When school administrators, classroom teachers, and special educators support these efforts, they enrich learners with opportunities for growth that will last a lifetime.

Volunteers and paraprofessionals

Another source of help for students and teachers in a heterogeneous learning environment is an "extra set of hands." In **The Reading Resource Handbook for School Leaders** (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1996), Del Patty, Janet Maschoff, and Peggy Ransom provide useful insights about parent volunteers and teacher aides supporting the language arts program. Specifically, these individuals may nurture learning by functioning as effective role models, reading to students,

listening to them read, listening to their retellings after silent reading, asking challenging questions concerning their reading, coaching their efforts, sharing and monitoring reading and writing, developing instructional materials, administering interest and attitude inventories, organizing a classroom newspaper, assisting with bulletin boards and classroom displays that encourage reading and writing, and serving as a resource during field trips. Volunteers and aides can make valuable contributions to the classroom context, and their support is vitally needed to accommodate the diversity of learning needs which has increased markedly in recent years.

Patty, Maschoff, and Ransom suggest that administrators, coordinators, or reading advisory boards administer questionnaires to obtain pertinent information for eliciting, managing, and developing effective volunteers and aides. Thus, in responding to a questionnaire that invites community participation, potential support people have opportunities to reflect on such items as "I would be able to read to students" and "I could work on bulletin boards to encourage reading." When formulating a management plan, a major consideration is matching the "right" volunteers or aides with the "right" teachers. One way of attaining this goal is to have teachers complete a questionnaire related to potential assignments for aides. For example, in responding to assignments like "Administer reading attitude and reading interest inventories to small groups of students," teachers may indicate whether the assignments are extremely important, fairly important, or not important in the

classroom. Since support people need to grow and develop, they should be given opportunities to complete items that represent potential workshop topics. These topics include "Conduct activities to help students' reading comprehension" and "Know the characteristics of children with learning problems." Next to the topics, respondents may indicate if they have a great need, moderate need, or little need to learn about the topics. Well-constructed questionnaires and surveys provide useful information that can lead to a functional plan of action for eliciting, managing, and developing effective volunteers and aides.

Supporting students and teachers with an "extra set of hands" increases their chances of success. This support is especially needed in heterogeneous learning environments, which are enriched and challenged daily by a diversity of strengths and needs.

Instructional resources

Students' journey toward success also involves natural immersion in authentic resources. All learners, including those at risk of failing, benefit from literacy-rich classrooms cluttered with paperbacks, anthologies, fiction and nonfiction works, dramas and comedies, poetry, illustrated books, "how-to" manuals, bibliotherapeutic stories, talking books, large-print books, dictionaries, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets. Students are more apt to respond positively to these materials when they are permitted to choose from a wide variety of options,

when they observe teachers respecting their choices, and when they are encouraged to read at their own comfortable pace in the classroom.

Being sensitive to students' interests and strengths will also help them to meet content area expectations, especially if teaching and learning are organized around important themes and concepts. For example, if the instructional unit concerns the American Civil War, an individual may demonstrate his or her preferred learning style by reading illustrated materials and by creating a flow chart showing important battles. Others may respond to thematic and conceptual aspects of the study unit in ways that represent their unique styles, as the teacher guides them to focus on instructional outcomes that fulfill curricular expectations. These flexible considerations not only provide immediate learning benefits, but also promote the lifelong love of learning.

Not surprisingly, this flexibility also applies to technological resources, which play a major role in helping students to be successful. Disabled learners, in particular, may benefit from adaptive hardware, such as seating devices, switches, electronic communication aids with voice synthesizers, and computers that scan printed materials and read the text aloud. While these and other hardware adaptations are necessary for individuals to learn effectively, certain software products are needed to meet a broad range of special needs.

In the October 1995 issue of **Technology & Learning**, a panel of experts suggests software for special needs students but

acknowledges that much of the software will benefit all learners as well. Among these resources are **Write: OutLoud** (Don Johnston) which is a talking word processor and **Language Experience Recorder** (Teacher Support Software) which is another talking word processor that reads back learners' writing by a non-judgmental source. In addition, **Storybook Weaver** (MECC), a multimedia product, stimulates creative writing and can be used across the curriculum. Also worth mentioning is **Student Writing Center** (The Learning Company) which provides opportunities for making choices, incorporating graphics, and producing reports, newspapers, and other documents.

Although appropriate instructional resources can facilitate learning in heterogeneous classrooms, a problematic economy has caused school administrators to allocate budgets for the basic curricula. Thus, textbooks, workbooks, software, and hardware related to basic skills are given top priority status, while resources supporting lifetime literacy efforts are considered a frill. Certainly, this "small-picture" perspective is detrimental to students' immediate and long-term growth because its reductionistic emphasis will dissuade students from wanting to learn and therefore will lessen their intrinsic motivation for developing the habit of learning.

Even with a difficult economy, effective administrators and teachers can secure appropriate resources (both qualitatively and quantitatively) by working cooperatively with the Parent-Teacher-Student Association to sponsor a resource drive. Through coffee

klatsches, newsletters, and other communication outlets, the PTSA can motivate the community to donate usable print and nonprint materials, software, and hardware. Afterward, a committee of teachers can organize these materials and designate them for content areas and grade levels. Another way of securing resources is to pursue financial support from the school budget, PTSA, teacher and administrative associations, local industry, and material and equipment grants.

A wide variety of resources in heterogeneous classrooms is a major source of support for students and teachers. This effort increases the chances that special needs students and their nondisabled classmates will respond positively to literacy learning and will use it throughout their lives.

Class size

As learners progress through the grades, they experience a number of transitions, including larger school buildings, seven or eight teachers and instructional periods each day, and larger classes. James Ysseldyke and Bob Algozzine (**Special Education: A Practical Approach for Teachers**, Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1995) believe that students without disabilities probably make these transitions more easily than learners with special needs. Educators should therefore work cooperatively to provide smooth passages for all students, especially those with disabilities.

An important consideration in attaining this goal is the creation of smaller classes so that teachers can accommodate the

strengths and needs of a diversity of learners. As early as the 1950s, the National Council of Teachers of English recommended that class loads for English teachers should not exceed 100. In a section of **Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts** (New York: Macmillan, 1991), Allan Glatthorn reviews research concerning class size and suggests implications for instruction. For example, in smaller classes, achievement seems to increase; discipline appears to improve because teachers better manage disruptive behavior, learners exhibit greater self-control, and students are more apt to focus on learning; participation tends to increase because potentially aggressive individuals are enabled to "gain the floor"; teachers' feedback is more likely to improve; and students' motivation and self-esteem seem to improve, while their anxiety appears to decrease. Surprisingly, smaller classes do not necessarily lead to significant variations in teaching methods--i.e., placing greater emphasis on individualized instruction--probably because teachers do not receive related staff development. Glatthorn concludes "If English teachers are expected to respond to student writing and to involve students in discussion, then the argument about the need for smaller English classes would seem to be ended." (p.444)

Glatthorn's review of the research has schoolwide implications. As educators across the curriculum continue to reach out to a diversity of students, they need a variety of support. Lowering class size is an important way of helping members of the learning community to contribute their best.

Staff development

Whether educators are experimenting with curricular congruence, connections between special education and team teaching, volunteers and paraprofessionals, instructional resources, or smaller classes, they need the support of staff development. My experiences in public education and my review of professional literature inform me that teachers and administrators who carry out innovations benefit from staff development options. These options include:

- **Full-day sessions.** With release time provided by substitute teachers, the professional staff is able to focus on important issues during full-day workshops. These sessions are especially effective when they are teacher-led, focus on pertinent needs, are spaced throughout the year, and encourage the application of new ideas to the classroom context.
- **Study groups.** Educators enjoy being equitable members of study groups that highlight collaboration, reflection, and growth. In successful study groups, a number of ingredients are evident, such as purpose, flexible logistics, professional materials, transfer of learning, electronic networking, and broad-based assessment. More information about this approach to staff development is found in one of my previous Reading Leadership columns (September 1993).
- **Peer coaching.** Teachers who are interested in using new strategies that benefit their students consider peer coaching to be an important part of staff development efforts that drive the

change process. According to Beverly Showers and Bruce Joyce (**Educational Leadership**, March 1996), peer coaching is effective when the entire faculty is involved, when critical feedback is omitted and collaborative activity is emphasized, when the teacher being observed is the "coach" and the teacher doing the observation is the "coached," and when professionals learn from one another by engaging in a variety of cooperative activities that have an impact on students' learning.

- **School/university partnerships.** For more than a decade, the University of Southern Maine and a group of school districts have effectively merged the worlds of theory, research, and practice. This partnership has progressed through different phases, including having initial conversations, reflecting on the conversations, taking steps to restructure schools, and making changes in teacher education. Ann Lieberman elaborates on this process as well as other teacher development practices in the April 1995 **Phi Delta Kappan**.
- **Time for collaboration.** Busy teachers need time to collaborate. In the September 1993 issue of **Educational Leadership**, Mary Anne Raywid summarizes the results of her research concerning how schools provide time for shared reflection. For example, in one school where educators are involved with a new cultural literacy curriculum, the building administrator offered to reduce the school day by 45 minutes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays if the teachers would contribute another 45 minutes of their own time. Complementing Raywid's research are Mike Schmoker's findings which are presented in his

recent monograph **Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement** (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1996). Schmoker believes that teamwork is an effective form of staff development and that this kind of collaboration is especially powerful when it is connected with clear goals, data analysis, and time for reflection. This results-oriented context has benefitted schools throughout the United States, including the Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. At Stevenson High School, students enter the building at 10:30 AM nine times a year so that teachers have time to collaborate.

Providing a variety of staff development options is a tangible way of recognizing, appreciating, and supporing innovative efforts. When schools respond flexibly to their professional needs, educators are more likely to experiment with new strategies that benefit students.

Support is vital

Humanistic innovations, such as mainstreaming, inclusion, and detracking, are intended to reach a diversity of learners and are useful for helping these learners achieve success with higher standards. As teachers and administrators carry out such innovations, they need substantial support. The six suggestions described in this month's column provide some of the tools for responding effectively to students' strengths and needs in heterogeneous classrooms.

Because of space limitations, other considerations have not been covered. For example, students need opportunities to gain insights about potential careers. Fortunately, the May 1995 issue of **Educational Leadership** focuses on the theme of connecting with the community and the world of work, and the April 1996 issue of **Phi Delta Kappan** provides a special section concerning the school-to-work transition. These and similar considerations enrich students with both immediate and lasting benefits.

Innovative teachers and administrators need serious support as they reach out to all learners, including those at risk of failing. Unless schools accommodate this need, educators will be unable to help all members of the learning community achieve their best.

An English teacher's schedule

representing mutual planning with learning center staff*

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5	Period 6	Period 7	Period 8
M	ENG 9	ENG 9 double period	ENG 9	PREP	LUNCH	SPEECH ARTS	OTHER VOICES	DUTY
T		PREP		ENG 9 double period				
W		ENG 9 double period		PREP				
TH		PREP		ENG 9 double period				
F		*Class-room teacher and LC staff meet for mutual planning		PREP				

Adapted from Sanacore (1988)

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